

Tenth Month, 2006

Dear Friends:

For over a year now the Pacific Yearly Meeting Ministry and Oversight Committee has been looking at issues about the “right holding” of the Yearly Meeting. Why do we meet? What are the essential elements of our gathering? What role, if any, does PYM play in our spiritual lives and the lives of our Meetings? We asked ourselves if we could step back and assess these matters so that we would not simply go forward out of habit. The core question is: Are we being faithful, and if not what do we need to do to come into right relationship with Spirit? The assumption we are making is that faith leads to action. Do the structures and organization of our Yearly Meeting support a radical faithfulness?

We have given different names to the process of reflection we are inviting Meetings to engage in this year. A plenary speaker from Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Tony Prete, (see upcoming Friends Bulletin article), presented us with the biblical concept of Sabbath which combines reflection, discernment and liberation. Although Sabbath does involve taking a break from routine practices, it is far from doing nothing. It is an opportunity to re-organize and re-align. To emphasize this intention, the committee has been most comfortable with the term “year of discernment,” but we welcome Friends to find the metaphors and language that work best for you.

As promised we are enclosing materials for Meetings and committees that wish to enter this process of reflection with us. In addition to the queries that were distributed at Representative Committee and at PYM, we have developed a new set of queries, some of which use the language of Sabbath. We also attach a resource list of materials that might assist the process. In addition the committee is offering its members as resource people, should you want help with facilitation, a sounding board, or a good listener. Members of the committee have signed up to be available to certain Meetings. If your Meeting or worship group is missing from the list and you would like this kind of assistance, please contact me at: (510) 526-5131 or lmagnani@juno.com.

Ministry and Oversight asked itself what activities we could put on hold this year in order to make room for discernment. At our Fall meeting we decided not to organize interest groups for the '07 Meeting, other than an open committee meeting. We also decided to suspend our liaison work with individual committees, although we will remain available to any committee that requests assistance. Other parts of our work could not be suspended, we believe, such as holding the Memorial Worship and organizing worship sharing groups. We invite other PYM committees to engage in a similar sorting process. What can you say “no” to, this year, in order to make room for new openings?

The year of discernment is intended to be an invitation – to PYM committees, Monthly Meetings, and Quarterly meetings, to identify what is essential and to examine whether our forms have become more important to us than the spiritual substance towards which we strive. Please send us your responses and learnings no later than May 1, 2007 so that PYM may re-organize in ways that keep us in right relationship. We will report back to Friends at the 2007 Yearly Meeting to see how we might “come round right.”

In peace,

Laura Magnani, clerk
PYM Ministry and Oversight